

VZCZCXRO3425
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHDS #0895/01 0820927
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 230927Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5264
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 000895

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: UNMEE: ETHIOPIA-ERITREA BORDER CALM DESPITE TROOP
BUILD-UP IN TSZ

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 874

[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 853

[1](#)C. ADDIS ABABA 418

[1](#)D. ASMARA 317

Classified By: ERIC WONG, ACTING POL-ECON COUNSELOR. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Acting UNMEE SRSG Ennifar said Eritrean troops continued to occupy the Temporary Security Zone and to establish defenses along the border with Ethiopia, but that the overall situation was "quiet," with "no sign of offensive action by either party." Despite UNSCR 1741, restrictions on UNMEE continue, and there has been no progress in demarcation of the border nor any resumption of working-level meetings between military representatives of both parties. Recent Eritrean settlements in border areas awarded to Ethiopia mirror similar settlements in Badme, Ennifar said. Were Eritrea to move tanks into Sector West, Ethiopia could easily deploy tanks to threaten the port of Assab, Ennifar noted. UNMEE assesses that both parties seek a political solution, but lack of diplomatic contacts renders progress difficult. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) Emboffs met March 20 with Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Ethiopia and Eritrea Amb. Azouz Ennifar and other senior officials of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), including Addis Ababa Head of Office Joseph Stephanides, Chief Military Liaison Officer Colonel Hannu Heino (Finland), and UN Military Observer (UNMO) Lieutenant Colonel Benitez (U.S.).

UNMEE DOWNSIZED, BUT NO OTHER PROGRESS ON UNSCR 1741

[1](#)3. (U) Ennifar said UNMEE was preparing the April progress report by the UN SYG, as mandated by UNSCR 1741 of January 2007, which had also, inter alia, requested Ethiopia and Eritrea to cooperate with the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC) and to implement the EEBC's decision; called for Eritrea (GSE) to lift its restrictions on UNMEE and to withdraw from the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), and for Ethiopia to accept the EEBC decision; and had called for the UN SYG and the international community to engage both parties diplomatically.

14. (C) On these points, Ennifar reported "no positive move on the EEBC decision," and that "none of the restrictions have been lifted." He noted that the GSE had published a letter on its website criticizing his appointment. UN plans to lower the security threat ranking for Asmara (i.e., reflecting that Asmara was less dangerous) could help reduce tensions with the GSE, Ennifar said. The only element of UNSCR 1741 that had been successfully completed was UNMEE's downsizing from 2,300 to 1,700, he said. UNMEE required sophisticated means of surveillance, not necessarily manpower, in order to fulfill its mandate, Ennifar said.

15. (C) Ennifar confirmed that David Bax, a South African working as an UNMEE Mine Action Coordination Committee (MACC) manager, had departed Eritrea on March 17, one day after being declared persona non grata by the GSE (ref D). Ennifar said the GSE had accused Bax of "fraternizing with the U.S. Embassy," by dismantling an Embassy armored vehicle and taking it into a MACC camp in the TSZ.

MILITARY UPDATE: ERITREA CONTINUES TROOP BUILD-UP IN TSZ

16. (C) Ennifar reported that no GSE troops had been withdrawn from the TSZ; on the contrary, Eritrea was continuing its troop build-up, especially in the TSZ's central sector. By establishing "settlements," Eritrea sought "to populate" the TSZ and border areas (e.g., near Tsorena) that the EEBC had

SIPDIS

awarded to Ethiopia, much as Ethiopia had encouraged new inhabitants to occupy Badme, Ennifar said. Eritrea was "slowly but surely taking over" areas that it had held in 1998, UNMEE assessed such movements as "defensive": likely intended to provide the GSE with "insurance" rather than to

ADDIS ABAB 00000895 002 OF 003

be provocative. Ethiopia had avoided reacting militarily, Ennifar noted. UNMEE Force Commander Masadeh was currently visiting UNMEE team sites in Sector West and Center.

17. (C) LTC Benitez commented that Eritrea's build-up had been cumulative: while there had not been any large-scale movement of battalions, the GSE now had a brigade-size force in Sector Center and another in Sector West of the TSZ. He characterized Eritrean troops' establishment of trench systems along main supply routes to Asmara and Assab as "strictly defensive." Eritrea was also establishing defenses in Sector West, which was more "hospitable" to tank movements. Ennifar said Eritrean activities in sub-Sector East were less of a concern, as 70 per cent was desert or mountainous terrain; however, this also highlighted the inaccuracy of GSE claims that troops/militia were engaged in "agricultural activities." As for Ethiopian movements, Benitez said the GOE had informed UNMEE that two Ethiopian regiments had returned to the Inda Silase area after completing training near Addis Ababa. Ennifar noted that Ethiopia "usually" informed UNMEE of its movements, except for its continued deployment of tanks at Bure.

18. (C) While Ethiopia did not appear to be concerned about the increased presence of Eritrean troops in the TSZ, it did object to GSE tanks, Ennifar said. Eritrea maintained 17 towed artillery pieces in the TSZ, while Ethiopia continued to deploy 12 tanks at Bure, less than 75km from the port of Assab. If Eritrea were to move tanks into Sector West, Ethiopia could easily deploy tanks to Assab, Ennifar noted.

19. (C) "The over all situation is quiet," Ennifar concluded, with "no sign of offensive action by either party." UNMEE's primary concern was continued GSE restrictions on freedom of movement of UNMEE patrols. Nevertheless, UNMEE continued to control the five main axes between Asmara and the TSZ, which were the only ones capable of moving heavy equipment into the TSZ. UNMEE had not seen any new movements of heavy equipment

SIPDIS

into the TSZ since GSE tanks entered Sector West in October 2006, nor had there been any mine or major cross-border incidents since those reported in the UN SYG's January 2007 report, Ennifar said. While UNMEE had offered its assistance and good offices to those seeking to resolve the recent abduction of Western and Ethiopian travelers in Afar, its only involvement had been to provide medical treatment for freed Western abductees at its hospital in Asmara.

PARTIES SEEK POLITICAL SOLUTION, BUT FAIL TO ENGAGE

¶10. (C) In contrast to earlier statements, the GSE now declared that rule of law, not war, would prevail, Ennifar noted. Benitez assessed that both parties now sought a political, not military, solution, and that Ethiopia's success in Somalia had underscored to Isaias that the GSE's military was "no match" for Ethiopia. Ennifar observed that Ethiopia had declined to protest Eritrean incursions into the TSZ's Central Sector in December 2006.

SIPDIS

¶11. (C) Ennifar said that Major-General R.K. Mehta, Military Advisor to the UN SYG, had recently visited Addis and Asmara, where he met GSE Commissioner Zecarias Ogbagaber. Asmara hoped for a strong initiative from the United States, Ennifar said; both parties believed only the USG could help. UNMEE Addis Ababa Head of Office Stephanides, expressing concern about the situation in Somalia destabilizing the region, also urged USG engagement.

-- Ennifar noted that Military Coordination Commission (MCC) meetings between Ethiopian and Eritrea military commanders remained suspended since July 2006; working-level meetings between sub-sector representatives had also been suspended. The only common position shared by both parties was their opposition to the recent EEBC decision announcing demarcation by coordinates, rather than physical demarcation on the ground, Ennifar added.

-- African Union Chairperson Konare's April address to the UNSC on Somalia and Darfur, Ennifar said, may present an opportunity to engage the AU on Ethiopia-Eritrea.

-- Uganda's foreign minister had recently visited Asmara, to warn the GSE to avoid promoting "foreign influence" in

ADDIS ABAB 00000895 003 OF 003

Somalia, Ennifar said.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Despite concern that Ethiopian allegations of Eritrean complicity in the recent hostage-taking could inflame cross-border tensions, UNMEE's current assessment that the border is "quiet" suggests a reduction of tensions since January, when the UN SYG characterized the situation as "tense but volatile." While assessed as "defensive" in nature, the cumulative effect of continued Eritrean troop movements into the TSZ, if left unchecked, will be a buffer zone that is no longer demilitarized. END COMMENT.

END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO